

DCFS Weekly Update From the State Office

Monday, April 9, 2001

The Performance Milestone Plan – Alive and Well

By Linda Wininger

Recently, I have heard of questions regarding the Division's Performance Milestone Plan (hereinafter called the Milestone Plan). Is it still the plan for DCFS system improvement? Has it been replaced with the Practice Model? Did the Federal Court do away with it? ...And what about the Settlement Agreement?

Confusion tends to cause problems in an organization. If we were all traveling to a certain city but did not have a travel plan for getting to the city we might all attempt to get there a different way and many might not get there at all. So it is important that everyone know not only the destination, but also the road we are traveling on. Knowing the road to take and the place to be make for efficient travel with the most productive result.

We know the destination. The best child welfare practice with the best results for the children and families we serve. The road is the Milestone Plan. But what about the Settlement Agreement? The Settlement Agreement expired some time ago. However, it was the road and onramp to the freeway that is the Milestone Plan. Parts of the Settlement Agreement and the practice it sought for us to attain live on in policy, statute, and the Milestone Plan. The Milestone Plan is now the road to take us to our destination.

Let me tell you just a little about the Milestone Plan, how far we have gotten, and what each of you can do to get us closer to our destination. The Milestone Plan has nine milestones. As we make each milestone we are closer to our destination. Each milestone has specific steps that must be taken, a way to measure achievement, and considerations for exit on that milestone.

Milestone 1 – Practice Model Development, Training, and Implementation

This milestone is designed specifically to strengthen DCFS staff members in their ability to provide reliable and effective services to children and families. Exit requires completed development of the Practice Model, the development of new employee training in the Practice Model, and a training system to continuously develop direct practice skills. We are getting there but there is still much to do. Each of us can help to achieve this milestone by attending Practice Model training and encouraging others to do so.

Milestone 2 – System Investment

This milestone acknowledges the fiscal support necessary to develop the structure and supports for effective child welfare practice. This milestone contains the SAFE database, staff deployment (staff retention and caseload sizes), training capacity, practice support tools such as cell phones and computers, and foster family retention. Rather than specifically exiting this milestone it will be considered that when other milestones are reached they have been reached through adequate investment. Working hard on the other milestones will help us to achieve this one.

Milestone 3 – System Management Structures

This milestone speaks to the need for sufficient management and administrative structure. Included are the DCFS Board, Administrative Team, Steering Committees, Regional Management Teams, and communication systems such as the Weekly Update.

😊 **THIS MILESTONE HAS BEEN EXITED!** 😊

Milestone 4 – Priority Focus Areas

This milestone identifies six areas where management will focus its attention and conduct special studies. These are CPS priority time frames, proximity issues relating to out-of-home placements, health and mental health care follow up, regular visits and family engagement, barrier removal for kin placement, and placement prevention/disruption fund. We continue to work on these areas. Some we have done well on; others we need to work on a bit harder. Keeping these focus areas in mind and lending support and creative ideas to them can do much to exit this milestone.

Milestone 5 – Accountability Structures

This milestone looks at the internal and external structures for reviewing work and practice. These include the SAFE database, case process reviews, annual outcome measures reports, peer evaluation, and review committee processes where peers review the work of staff within DCFS. External structures are the Office of Child Protection Ombudsman, Foster Care Citizen Review Board, Child Fatality Review, Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel, Consumer Hearing Panel, Office of Services Review, and DCFS Board.

😊 **THIS MILESTONE HAS ALSO BEEN EXITED!** 😊

Milestone 6 – Trend Data Analysis

This milestone uses numerical data in line with national data to compare Utah's data with developing national standards. There are 16 trend indicators. Strategies have been developed to improve system performance in four problem areas. These areas are: meeting CPS priority 3 time frames, reducing the amount of time for a child to attain permanency, reducing the number of placements for children in foster care, and increasing the number of youth completing the Independent Living Program. A large component to the exit of this milestone is the consistent functioning of the Front-Line Trend Analysis Committee and the State Specialist Trend Analysis Committee. Good participation on these committees and the effective use of the plans generated from these committees, along with the State and Regional Quality Improvement Committees are what is needed to exit this milestone.

Milestone 7 – Case Process Review

This milestone uses the case process review to examine the performance of DCFS in key case practices that are essential to child safety, permanence, and well-being. Case process review looks at conformance to policy, statute, and the Milestone Plan. In order to exit this milestone, a region must achieve the performance goals for two consecutive years. Case process goals are 90% for some and 85% for most. Our numbers have gone down in the last year. Numbers in some areas have fallen from passing to below passing. This is a milestone that each worker can do much to achieve, and without the hard work of each worker it will not be achieved. **WE NEED YOUR HELP.** Ask your regional administration what your team needs to work on and then get to it! We can do this. I know we can.

Milestone 8 – Qualitative Case Review

This milestone instituted a new method of evaluating DCFS performance. Qualitative case reviews not only look at the case process but actually conduct interviews with the people involved with the case including the family. We have had mixed reviews this year. Some regions have done better in most areas. Some have not. Achieving this milestone requires 85% of all cases to attain an “acceptable” score in child and family status and also in system performance. Our overall score for child and family status statewide in 2000 was 78.2%. Our score for system performance was 41.6%. You can see that we need to work in both areas but especially in system performance. Several activities can help us to achieve this milestone. We have seen significant improvement in regions that do the following:

- Supervisors and other region administrators participate as qualitative case reviewers.
- Case process reviews are taken seriously and an attempt is made to do well on them. A concerted effort is made to ensure that documentation is in the case record.
- Quality Assurance Scan Projects are used by supervisors to review one case per caseworker per month to determine what is being done well and what needs additional work.

Milestone 9 – Quality Improvement Committees

This milestone uses trend analysis data, case process review information, and qualitative case review data in conjunction with regional and state committees staffed by volunteers from the communities to evaluate and suggest changes in resource deployment, policy, procedure, and practice that will improve and maintain favorable outcomes. State and Regional Quality Improvement Committees are in place. The challenge now is to use the information they generate to create and implement plans for change that will lead us to better practice.

I hope this has identified the road and the “milestones” on that road that will lead us to the goal of best practice and optimum outcomes for the families we serve. If you have comments or questions or would like additional information drop me an email! You can also view the Milestone Plan in its entirety on the DCFS web site at www.dhs.state.ut.us. Click on “Agencies”, then “Child & Family Services”, then “The Performance Milestone Plan May 1999.”